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THE FLEET IN ACTION

I.—Battleships and Destroyers

By Frederic J. Haskin.

The American fighting fleet is this week off the coast of New England, playing the war game. The greater part of the manœuvres of this year are grouped around the assumption that the United States is being attacked by a foreign force seeking to land an army. The fleet is going through its paces in just the way it would proceed in case of the great emergency.

And just what are these fighting units upon which the fate of a nation would rest in case of war? The other day they fled out past the Goddard of Liberty in review beneath the eye of the President. A simplified navy is that of the United States, made up almost entirely of two classes of ships—the battleship and the destroyer. There are great battle cruisers in the navies of other nations, but American cruisers are important and employed chiefly for patrol duty in the Caribbean and the Orient. The destroyer assumes the duty of a cruiser in the fighting fleet just as it serves the purpose of a gunboat when a vessel of light draft is needed for river work. So the American navy at work on the war game this week, has few ships other than battleships and destroyers.

Eighteen battleships and probably twice as many destroyers are participating in this war game. When this force put to sea from the harbor of New York, each great ship, with its nose in the track of the vessel preceding it, and with the screen of destroyers thrown out in advance and to right and left, a mighty force was set in motion. Aboard each battleship were 1,600 officers and men, or a total of 18,000 people. The destroyers carried 100 men each, which added another 3,600. So the population of the fleet that was putting to sea became equal to that of Phoenix, Ariz., and Cheyenne, Wyo., combined, though each of these cities is the capital and metropolis of a state. There were more able bodied men aboard these ships than would be found in a city like Albany or Dallas or Spokane.

Each of these battleships, weighed, on the average, 20,000 tons and the destroyers 1,000 tons. So here was a total of 4,000,000 tons of steel—such a load as would require a freight train five miles long to haul. This vast force, rushing to sea at a speed of twenty knots an hour, had cost the nation more than \$200,000,000 to build. Since the world began such an amount of money has not been spent in creating a thing that moves, except by Great Britain in building another fighting fleet that is bigger than this. Since time began no such titan force has ever been set in motion except when great fleets have put to sea.

These battleships of the active fleet tell a remarkable tale of the development in these floating fortresses. None of them is more than twenty years old, for a battleship is considered as having served its purpose and become useless in that time. Yet the older ships of the fleet, such as the Rhode Island, the New Jersey and the Nebraska, were born in the era prior to 1906, when the dreadnought came into being and set a new standard in fighting ships. These vessels are of but 14,000 tons weights. Then appears the Delaware, that ship of a magnificent record, among the first of the dreadnoughts. It was completed in 1910 and weighed 20,000 tons, being the marvel of her time. Yet she is a small ship when compared with those new ships of the navy, the New York or the Texas, each of which weighs 27,000 tons. Its position is that which would be occupied by a man of six feet stature upon the appearance of a rival eight feet tall. Yet these latter giants are not to hold their place for long, for the Pennsylvania and the Arizona are progressing toward completion and these are to weigh 31,000 tons and their arrival will be comparable with the heights of a nine foot man. So has the size of the battleship doubled in a decade.

The Delaware may be considered an average ship of the present navy, it having been the second dreadnought of the ten that are now in commission. The Delaware draws twenty-seven feet of water, and is 530 feet long. Its net work masts reach 115 feet above the water and the big guns may shoot through them without seriously damaging them. Each of the ship's anchors weighs 17,000 pounds and every link in the chain that holds them weighs 100 pounds. The armor on her sides is 11 inches thick. The pay roll of the ship is \$37,000 a month, and it costs \$3 a month to feed each man in the crew. Officers are required to maintain their own mess. The 12-inch guns are mounted two in a turret, and a turret, weighing 700 tons, may be turned about by the pressure of a finger which controls the electric motive power.

These battleships are the backbone of the fleet, and American authorities hold, are still the element that will determine the control of the seas. They are huge, floating fortresses, the guns of which are intended to destroy whatever enemy they may encounter. Other naval craft are but the satellites that revolve about these stars of the first magnitude. Their purpose is to aid and to protect the first class ships.

The destroyers are the most important of the smaller ships. They are the light cavalry of the seas. The

purpose they serve is to the navy exactly that rendered to the army by its cavalry. They are the scouts, the shields, the leaders in wild dashes, weighing as much as 1,000 tons and drawing ten feet of water. Each has four officers and 100 men. They are the swiftest ships afloat, being capable of 30 knots, or 34 miles, an hour. The average destroyer is fitted with three double torpedo tubes and with five 3-inch guns. They have absolutely no armor and are therefore sure of destruction if a big gun gets a crack at them.

Were a hostile fleet to start from Europe to America, the agents of this country would report its departure. After that fleet had got to sea the first task of the Americans would be to determine its whereabouts, to keep track of it. As an army sends out its cavalry to scout for an enemy that is known to be approaching, so the navy would send out its destroyers. The destroyer flotilla of probably 25 ships would be formed into five divisions. Each division would choose a sea lane and, stretching out for a mile, would scour the lane. All the time communication would be maintained by wireless with the main fleet.

Finally the enemy fleet would be found. The destroyers would attempt to communicate their information to their fellows and to the home fleet. The enemy would try to prevent this by hammering away at their instruments in such a way as to interfere with the message. The destroyer flotilla would concentrate in the path of the enemy fleet. Theirs would be the privilege of opening the fight. Waiting for darkness or a fog, these swift little vessels would dash in upon the great ships of the enemy as the light brigade charged at Balaklava. No boat would show a light. There would probably be enemy destroyers thrown out as a screen. Fast these, defying their torpedoes and 3-inch and 4-inch guns the charge would be carried. Hurling themselves into range of the big ships they would launch their torpedoes, turn about and race out of range. In the meantime, however, the searchlights of the big ships and the enemy destroyers would have found them out and the gunners would be busy. Despite this, when out of range, they would reform for another dash. The enemy would be indeed fortunate if some of the big ships were not sent to the bottom.

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